

Story 2003 (1969 Tape 14)

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Location: Tokat, capital of Tokat Province; but taped in Erzurum by Dr. Saim Sakaoğlu

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### Lies and Luck That Changed a Life

Once there was a woman who stood before her house and kept shouting, “My daughter, my daughter! My clever daughter can in a day spin a batman<sup>1</sup> of wool and from that thread can weave a carpet!” No one seemed to pay much attention to her for some time.

After awhile, however, a merchant passed that way and overheard her words. He thought, “Perhaps I should marry such a competent girl who can spin and weave so rapidly. Marrying her could be a very profitable move.” He explained to the mother who he was, and then he asked for the hand of the girl in marriage. Both the mother and her daughter accepted his proposal, and shortly afterwards the two were married.

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<sup>1</sup>A batman was formerly a Turkish unit of weight. Its weight varied over the years between 2 and 8 okkas (another early unit of weight). Since the okka itself varied in weight between 5.5 and 22 pounds, a batman might equal anywhere from 11 to 176 pounds. It is unlikely that anyone could both spin and weave 11 pounds of wool in a day, and it would be utterly impossible for one to process 176 pounds in this way.

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Sometime after the wedding, the merchant said to his wife, “I must go on a business trip, and I shall probably be gone for as long as forty days. During that time I expect you to spin this heap of wool into thread and then use the thread to make carpets.” The wife agreed to this, and her husband departed on his journey.

But after the merchant left, his wife spent most of her time talking to her neighbors and visiting her friends. Time slipped away, and thirty-nine days had passed before she thought again of her husband’s order. She and her mother then began frantically to turn the shreds of wool into thread on their spinning wheels. After awhile they grew hungry, and the mother said, “My daughter, let us fix some helva<sup>2</sup> to eat.”

“Very well,” said the daughter, “but let us continue spinning as we do so.” Covered with shreds of loose wool, each kept spinning with one hand and making the helva with the other hand. The mother was struggling to heat the sesame oil in a frying pan.

Just at that time the son of a devil observed the two women. He sensed how ridiculous they looked, all covered with loose shreds of wool. But he was even more amused by their awkward movements as each tried to do two things at the same time. He laughed loudly, and

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<sup>2</sup>Helva is a favorite Turkish confection. It is made of a mixture of cereal, honey or syrup, and sesame oil.

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in stretching his face to do that, he burst open a painful boil on his cheek. When the boil split open, infected matter flowed out, and as a result, he felt greatly relieved.

Immediately after that, the devil himself appeared. He said to the women, "You have started the healing of my son's cheek. He laughed so hard at your ludicrous situation that he burst open the painful boil on his face. You may ask from me anything that you wish, and I shall give it to you.

The daughter answered, "Our only wish is to have this heap of wool spun into thread from which carpets should then be woven." The devil accepted this request, and by means of magic he had all of the wool turned at once into carpets.

When the merchant returned, he saw several new carpets stacked in one corner of the main room of the house. He was very impressed that his wife had been able to accomplish so much in just forty days. He said, "My wife, you must have worked very hard while I was gone. Make us some coffee. Then we can sit and rest as we drink it."

She fixed the coffee, and when it was ready, they sat in comfort and began drinking it. Just then a cockroach entered the room. When the young wife saw it, she put her cup down in front of that insect and said, "Here, auntie, have some coffee with us."

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Surprised by what he heard, the husband asked, "To whom are you talking? Besides ourselves, I see no one in this room but a cockroach."

His wife then said, "This cockroach that you see was my aunt, who came to help us spin the wool into thread and then make from it those carpets that you see in the corner. We worked so hard and so fast that we were all turned into cockroaches, and she—poor woman—has not yet recovered her human form."

The merchant was shocked by what he heard. "Oh, my dear wife," he said, "I do not want you ever to spin thread or weave carpets again. In fact, you should not work at all. We have enough wealth to live happily without working." After that, they did nothing but enjoy themselves and live comfortably.